

for any purpose. The system stood in the place of cultivation by slaves, the * latifundia ' that ruined ancient Italy, even if it also stood in the place of free labour.

In the later Middle Ages it gradually broke up, by a process that we can trace step by step. New economic conditions produced new ideas of what society should be, which in their turn reacted strongly on the economic conditions themselves. The Eising of 1381 sets it beyond doubt that the peasant had grasped the conception of complete personal liberty, that he held it degrading to perform forced labour, and that he considered freedom to be his right.

It appears, however, from the Manor Bolls, that the commutation of the forced services of the villein for money rents paid to the lord, had begun more than a century before the Rising, probably long before there was among the peasants any widespread feeling of the hardship of serfdom. Economic pressure and purely financial considerations induced the landlords, in many cases, to work their demesne land by hired labour, instead of by the compulsory services of the villein. The change came slowly, in one department after another of agricultural life. Before the fourteenth century opened, the bailiffs had been forced to hire shepherds for the sheep, and wards for the pigs and cattle. The bond-slaves, who at the time of the Conquest had driven the swine to their pannage in the acorn forests, had, partly from the influence of Christian ideas on their masters, partly from their own intense desire to be free from the collar of abject slavery, been emancipated within about a hundred years of Hastings.¹ But it was difficult to use the villein in place of Gurth the swineherd, who had been forced to guard his master's property all the year round ; for the villein owed services only on certain days of the week and the year, and during the days which were his own the lord's animals would be unguarded. So, first, the offices of herdsmen became regularly filled by hired labour.² As time went on, the bailiffs began more and more to find that it was advantageous to have the ploughing done in the same way. The serf who was required to

¹ Ashley, i. 1, 18 j *Arch&ologia*, xxx. 218-2&, ⁸ qt¹. W. Page, **23**.